

Chelsea relish accomplishment

AFP, London



Carlo Ancelotti backed his Chelsea squad to rule English

football for years to come after Didier Drogba and co. wrested the Premier League title back from Manchester United in the Italian's first season in charge.

An 8-0 thrashing of Wigan on Sunday ensured that Chelsea pipped the defending champions by a single point.

The emphatic conclusion to the season meant the former AC Milan boss was also able to celebrate a Premier League record of 103 goals as well as membership of an exclusive club of managers who have got the better of his United counterpart Sir Alex Ferguson.

"It's fantastic, we did our best and I did my best for this club," Ancelotti said after deluding a triumph that elevated Avram Grant, Luiz Felipe Scolari and Guus Hiddink, the men who tried but failed to fill the gap left by Jose Mourinho's departure from the club.

"It's been a great Premier League season and I think in the end we deserved to come out on top."

United did their job by beating Stoke 4-0 at Old Trafford but there was never any prospect of Chelsea falling at the final hurdle.

Ancelotti's men will now

seek to complete a domestic double in the FA Cup final against Portsmouth on Saturday and the Italian, a specialist in getting the best out of players in their 30s during his time at Milan, dismissed suggestions that the current squad has passed its peak.

"I think that this club will have a future because these players are not so old and we have a very good squad, for next year and the years after," he said.

"We had a fantastic season, not only by winning the Premier League but because we showed a good style on the pitch," Ancelotti said. "After the first year, I hope to stay here a long time and win a lot of titles."

Against injury-depleted opponents, it took Nicolas Anelka only five minutes to calm the Chelsea supporters' nerves with the opener and any doubt over the destiny of

the trophy disappeared just after the half hour mark when Gary Caldwell wrestled Frank Lampard to the ground inside the box.

The Scotland defender was given his marching orders and Lampard got up to fire in a textbook penalty for his 22nd league goal of the season.

Didier Drogba got involved in an unseemly spat with Lampard over who was taking Chelsea's first penalty but still finished the afternoon with a hat-trick, which ensures he takes the EPL's golden boot with a total of 29 league goals, three more than Wayne Rooney managed for United.

Arsenal clinched third place with a 4-0 win over Fulham, ensuring another money-spinning season of Champions League football at the Emirates.

The Gunners enter directly at the group stage while Tottenham's fourth place means they must come

TOP SCORERS	
29	Didier Drogba (Chelsea)
26	Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
24	Darren Bent (Sunderland)
23	Carlos Tevez (Manchester City)
22	Frank Lampard (Chelsea)

Ferguson applauds Ancelotti

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson congratulated Chelsea on winning the English Premier League on Sunday, but vowed to reclaim the title next season.

Though United beat visitors Stoke 4-0, they had to settle for second place as leaders Chelsea crushed Wigan 8-0 to take the trophy back to Stamford Bridge after three years at Old Trafford.

"It was always going to be hard for Wigan to get something," Ferguson said.

"When we heard they were down to 10 men all our hopes evaporated."

"You can't agonise over these things. Sometimes you get the breaks, on other occasions you don't."

"The European Cup was the biggest disappointment. We should be in the final."

"But we applaud Chelsea winning the title and I applaud Carlo Ancelotti. We know how hard it is to win the league."

Ferguson said he was pleased with his team, despite ending the season with only the League Cup in the trophy cabinet.



Chelsea players celebrate with the Premier League trophy at the end of their match against Wigan Athletic at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

STANDINGS

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Chelsea	38	27	5	6	103	32	86 (champs)
Man Utd	38	27	4	7	86	28	85
Arsenal	38	23	6	9	83	41	75
Tottenham	38	21	7	10	67	41	70
Man City	38	18	13	7	73	45	67
Aston Villa	38	17	13	8	52	39	64
Liverpool	38	18	9	11	61	35	63
Everton	38	16	13	9	60	49	61
Birmingham	38	13	11	14	38	47	50
Blackburn	38	13	11	14	41	55	50
Stoke	38	11	14	13	34	48	47
Fulham	38	12	10	16	39	46	46
Sunderland	38	11	11	16	48	56	44
Bolton	38	10	9	19	42	67	39
Wolves	38	9	11	18	32	56	38
Wigan	38	9	9	20	37	79	36
West Ham	38	8	11	19	47	66	35
Burnley	38	8	6	24	42	82	30 --relegated
Hull	38	6	12	20	34	75	30 --relegated
Portsmouth	38	7	7	24	34	66	19 --relegated

Note: Portsmouth deducted 9 points for entering administration

ROLL OF HONOUR

- 2010: Chelsea
- 2009: Manchester United
- 2008: Manchester United
- 2007: Manchester United
- 2006: Chelsea

RESULTS

Arsenal 4 (Arshavin 21, Van Persie 26, Baird 37-og, Vela 84) Villa 0
Aston Fulham 0 Blackburn 1 (Dunne 84-og)
Bolton 2 (Davies 33, Klasnic 60) Birmingham 1 (McFadden 77)
Burnley 4 (Elliott 42, Cork 54, Paterson 71, Thompson 88) Tottenham 2 (Bale 3, Modric 32)
Chelsea 8 (Anelka 6, 57, Lampard 32-pen, Kalou 54, Drogba 63, 68-pen, 80, A.Cole 90) Wigan 0
Everton 1 (Bilyaletdinov 90) Portsmouth 0
Hull 0 Liverpool 0
Man Utd 4 (Fletcher 31, Giggs 38, Higginbotham 54-og, Park 84) Stoke 0
West Ham 1 (Boa Morte 17) Man City 1 (Wright-Phillips 21)
Wolves 2 (Doyle 10-pen, Guedioura 78) Sunderland 1 (Jones 8)

through a final qualifier to fully benefit from their elevation to a place among Europe's elite.

Andrey Arshavin, Robin van Persie and Carlos Vela were on target for Arsenal, who also benefited from an own goal by Chris Baird against opponents who clearly had one eye on Wednesday's Europa League final against Atletico Madrid.

A memorable season for Spurs ended in weary fashion and with manager Harry Redknapp fuming at his side for conceding a two-goal lead to lose 4-2 at Burnley.

"We've had a great season, I've been delighted with the performances during the year, but you always want to win,"

Redknapp said. "I didn't come here just to have a jolly up."

A deeply frustrating season for Liverpool ended with a goalless draw at Hull that ensured Rafael Benitez's side could finish no better than seventh in the table.

Above them, in fifth place, are Manchester City, who were held to a 1-1 draw at West Ham, and Aston Villa, who held on to sixth place despite a late Richard Dunne own goal resulting in a 1-0 defeat at home to Blackburn.

Those results mean Liverpool will have to come through a final qualifier as well as the play-off round to get into the group stages of next season's Europa League.

Totti rescues Roma

AFP, Rome



Two late goals from Francesco Totti gave AS Roma a nervy 2-1 victory at home to Cagliari on Sunday and ensured the Serie A title will be decided on the final day of the season.

Inter Milan maintained their two-point lead at the top with a 4-3 success over Chievo at the San Siro that proved less comfortable than it should have been.

Inter travel to Siena while Roma will be entertained by Chievo next weekend.

The nerazzurri can sew up a fifth title in a row with victory while Roma can only secure their first scudetto since 2001 if they win and Inter fail to do so.

At one stage in the afternoon's proceedings, Inter were cruising at 4-1 while an Andrea Lazzari goal direct from a free-kick gave Cagliari a shock 1-0 lead in Rome with just 17 minutes remaining, meaning Inter were virtual champions.

Inter fans were celebrating in the stands but two goals just four minutes apart from Roma captain and talisman Totti silenced them.

Totti's goals were the perfect response after the 33-year-old forward was roundly criticised in midweek following his sending off in Roma's 1-0 Coppa Italia final defeat to Inter for a wild kick at Mario Balotelli.

His first goal was a close-range shot across the goalkeeper with 11 minutes left and his second, from the spot with seven minutes remaining, came after Davide Biondini was harshly penalised when a John Arne Riise cross hit his upper arm in the box.

Roma had dominated the first period, with Totti and Marco Motta hitting the woodwork, but they were lacklustre at the beginning of the second and failed to heed the warnings when both Jeda and Alessandro Matri wasted glorious opportunities to give Cagliari the lead.

But after Lazzari's strike, Roma's dramatic late comeback ensured they are still alive and kicking.

At the San Siro, Inter fell behind on 12 minutes as Luciano flung over a free-kick from the right and the ball hit Thiago Motta on the chest and bounced beyond Julio Cesar for an own goal.

But just a minute later it was all square, both

in terms of the score and the number of own goals as Samuel Eto'o juggled the ball in the box and fired it across goal where it bounced off Andrea Mantovani's hip and past a bemused Stefano Sorrentino.

On 34 minutes Inter were ahead as Maicon galloped down the right and crossed deep to the back post where Cambiasso arrived to side-foot home.

The third came with a touch of genius from Diego Milito, who chipped Sorrentino from 20 yards with the goalkeeper slightly off his line.

Seven minutes after the break the game was effectively over as a contest as a long ball from Maicon sent Balotelli clear of the back line and he too lobbed Sorrentino.

But goals from Pablo Granoche and Sergio Pellissier ensured Inter had a nervous last quarter of an hour.

In other games, Sampdoria drew 1-1 at Palermo to remain two points ahead of their hosts in the race for fourth place and Champions League football next season.

Atalanta will join Livorno and Siena in Serie B next season as they were relegated following a 2-0 defeat at Napoli.

RESULTS

Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 15) Catania 1 (Lopez 52)
Fiorentina 1 (Marchionni 15) Siena 1 (Vergassola 3)
Genoa 1 (Sculli 57) AC Milan 0
Inter Milan 4 (Mantovani 13-og, Cambiasso 34, Milito 39, Balotelli 52) Chievo 3 (Motta 12-og, Granoche 60, Pellissier 74)
Juventus 2 (Del Piero 16, Iaquineta 90) Parma 3 (Lanzafame 20, 35, Biabiany 85)
Livorno 1 (Lucarelli 33) Lazio 2 (Rocchi 13, Brocchi 44)
Napoli 2 (Quagliarella 43, 83) Atalanta 0
Palermo 1 (Miccoli 68-pen) Sampdoria 1 (Pazzini 54-pen)
AS Roma 2 (Totti 79, 83-pen) Cagliari 1 (Lazzari 73)
Udinese 3 (Di Natale 21, 63 Pepe 26) Bari 3 (Barreto 18, Koman 39, Almiron 90)

IN BRIEF

Totti banned for 4 matches

AFP, Rome

Roma skipper Francesco Totti has been handed a four-match suspension for being sent off in the 1-0 loss to Inter Milan in the Italian Cup final.

The veteran striker was given his marching orders two minutes from time on Wednesday for kicking the ankle of Inter's Mario Balotelli.

Totti claimed that the Ghana-born Balotelli had targeted him with insults and that he had reacted to this.

The Inter striker denied Totti's claims and said instead that he had hurled racial abuse at him.

The Roma player will purge his sanction at the start of next year's cup competition.

Benfica wrap up league title

AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese powerhouses Benfica secured their 32nd league title after beating Rio Ave 2-1 at home on the final day of the season on Sunday.

The Lisbon club finished five points clear of second-place Sporting Braga, who were held 1-1 by Nacional, to clinch their first title since 2005.

Braga's position in the final standings is the highest in their history.

It also means that third-place FC Porto, champions for the last four seasons, will miss out on next season's Champions League for the first time since they won the UEFA Cup in 2003.

Rooney injury not serious

AFP, London

Wayne Rooney will be fit in time to play a full part in England's World Cup campaign, Manchester United assistant-boss Mike Phelan has said.

The 34-goal striker was pulled off 13 minutes from the end of United's 4-0 win over Stoke at Old Trafford after suffering a recurrence of the groin problem that has troubled him since the second leg of his side's Champions League defeat to Bayern Munich last month.

With Fabio Capello due to name his 30-man provisional World Cup squad tomorrow, the Italian needed some reassurance about his talisman.

Crisis talks won the title

AFP, London



As Carlo Ancelotti surveyed the forlorn expressions on his players' faces after Chelsea's dismal draw at Blackburn, the Blues boss knew he needed to do something drastic to save his side's season.

When Ancelotti's weary-looking squad crashed out of the Champions League against Jose Mourinho's Inter Milan on March 16 and then dropped two vital points in a 1-1 draw at Blackburn five days later, it seemed their campaign was on the verge of imploding.

The lacklustre performance at Blackburn left Chelsea four points behind Manchester United and predictions of the Blues' demise were widespread in the following days.

Those sentiments seemed to be shared by Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich and his lieutenants Eugene Tenenbaum and Ron Gourlay, who shattered the leafy tranquility of the club's Cobham training ground by calling a meeting following the Inter match to round on Ancelotti and his players for what they saw as the team's underachievement.

But Ancelotti knew better. He saw that his team's morale was at a low ebb and was determined to clear the air once and

for all.

He told the players to speak their minds about what they felt needed to be done to put the club back on track.

No stone was left unturned as John Terry, Frank Lampard, Didier Drogba, Michael Ballack and Petr Cech led the inquest into Chelsea's inconsistent form.

Ancelotti took heed of suggestions from Terry and company that his 'diamond' formation was restricting Lampard's ability to break forward and score from midfield and agreed to revert to the 4-3-3 system which Chelsea had used so impressively under Jose Mourinho.

The Italian's openness and refreshing lack of ego brought him closer to a group who were still disciples of Mourinho and his methods.

As they filed out of the meeting and headed to their mansions in the Surrey stockbroker-belt, Chelsea's stars were already feeling as though a weight had been lifted from their shoulders.

"Everyone spoke their mind. We got a few things off our chest that we were feeling," Terry said.

"On that day, Blackburn wanted it more than us. We should have been the team fighting to keep our place at the top of the table and they showed more fight than we did, which was not acceptable."

"Everyone spoke honestly. It is impor-

tant that we have players who are prepared to speak their minds.

"It's important that we've got big characters around us to make sure we get up, get back on the horse and go again."

A trip to struggling Portsmouth was the ideal opportunity to turn the positivity from the meeting into points on the pitch.

Ancelotti's side did more than that though. They romped to a 5-0 win with a ruthless counter-attacking display that brought back memories of Mourinho's glory days.

Suddenly Chelsea had rediscovered their swagger. Further evidence of their revival came three days later as Aston Villa were put to the sword in a 7-1 demolition, which featured four goals from Lampard, thriving again in the system that suits him best.

That set the stage for a crucial 2-1 win at Manchester United which restored Chelsea to the top of the table and put the destiny of the title in their hands.

Even a defeat at Tottenham couldn't upset Chelsea's equilibrium as their restored team-spirit survived one last test of their nerve.

Needing wins from their last two matches, the Blues secured a 2-0 victory at Liverpool and then thrashed Wigan 8-0 on the last day to prove the old adage that it's good to talk.

Pellegrini confident of Real stay

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Manuel Pellegrini insists he is still confident he will be in charge of the club next season despite the possibility that Madrid could end the season empty-handed.

Real beat Athletic Bilbao 5-1 on Saturday to stop Barcelona from winning the title but Madrid trail Barca by one point going into the final day of the season and must win at Malaga and hope the champions slip up at home to Valladolid.

It makes Barcelona, who beat Sevilla 3-2, strong favourites to retain the trophy and casts a dark cloud over Pellegrini's future.

"You will have to ask the board. I have one more year left on my contract and no one has told me that I am not going to continue next season," said Pellegrini.

"I am happy to have got the highest points tally in Real Madrid's history and I don't see any reason not to continue."

Real have netted a club record 95 points this season scoring over a century of goals in the process but Barcelona have 96 and are poised to land the title.

"Barcelona can celebrate whatever they like as there is still one game left to go," said Chilean Pellegrini.

"It is difficult for us to win the league as we realise Barcelona's most complicated match was

in Sevilla but they face a Valladolid that are fighting to stay up and anything is possible in football."

After spending over 250 million euros in the summer on a new collection of 'Galacticos' Real were expected to bring home some silverware whether it be the league, Champions League or both.

Real failed in Europe with a last 16 Champions League exit to Lyon all the more painful as the final will be at their Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

A Kings Cup humiliation to third division Alcorcon and two defeats to Barcelona in 'El Clasico' all piled more pressure on Pellegrini and failure to win the league could be the final straw despite his impressive statistics.

"We have all said over the course of the season that we are happy with Pellegrini. We hope he stays on," said defender Alvaro Arbeloa.

Real have shown in the past that they are not afraid to chop and change coaches and there has been increased speculation that Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho could take over in the summer.

Former Chelsea coach Mourinho, 47, saw his popularity in Madrid rocket after masterminding Barcelona's downfall in the Champions League semifinals and has been coy over his future.

Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo has already come out and praised his compatriot Mourinho who used to work as a translator for Bobby Robson at arch rivals Barcelona.

Everton to renew Cahill deal

AFP, Liverpool

Everton are hoping to tie Tim Cahill to a new long-term contract before the midfielder gets a chance to boost his value by starring for Australia at the World Cup.

Cahill has two years left on his current deal but manager David Moyes wants an extension agreed with the 30-year-old as soon as possible and chief executive Robert Elstone confirmed talks were close to a conclusion.

"We are at an advanced stage of negotiation with Tim and his representatives," Elstone said. "We would be hopeful of concluding an extension to Tim's current deal and to put pen to paper on a new four-year contract before he departs for the World Cup."

Cahill has scored 56 goals in 209 appearances for the Toffees since moving from Millwall in 2004 and has established himself as one of the most feared attacking midfielders in the Premier League.



PHOTO: AFP

Roma captain Francesco Totti scores one of his two goals from a penalty during their Serie A encounter against Cagliari at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Sunday.